

## RABIES

### **What is rabies?**

Rabies is a rare viral disease of the brain which is nearly always fatal. Each year, rabies is detected in approximately 200 mostly wild animals throughout California and approximately 6,000 animals nationally. Human rabies is rare in the United States and California; only 15 human rabies cases have occurred in California since 1980.

### **Which animals get rabies?**

All mammals, including humans are susceptible to infection with rabies virus. In California, skunks and bats are the animals that are most frequently identified with rabies. Rabies is occasionally detected in other wild animals such as coyotes, foxes, and raccoons. Domestic animals such as dogs, cats, horses, and cattle are infrequently diagnosed with rabies.

### **What are the signs of rabies in animals?**

Signs of rabies in animals vary by species and stage of the disease. In general, the most obvious sign of rabies in wild animals is abnormal behavior, such as:

- Wild animals that seem unusually tame or unafraid of approaching people.
- Nocturnal animals such as skunks, foxes, or bats that are active during the day.
- Pets that have difficulty walking, eating, or drinking, or whose personalities change.
- Normally docile animals that act in an agitated or aggressive manner.
- Bats that are unable to fly or have been caught by a domestic dog or cat.

### **How do people get rabies?**

Rabies virus is shed in the saliva of rabid animals. Humans and other animals can get rabies when the rabid animal bites them, or when saliva from a rabid animal gets into a break in their skin or mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, nose).

### **What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?**

The symptoms of rabies can be quite varied and there is no single symptom that is consistently suggestive of rabies. Typically, patients with rabies first experience fever, headache, and malaise approximately four to eight weeks after exposure to the virus. Early nervous symptoms can include tingling, itching, or numbness at the bite site; difficulty walking, speaking, or swallowing; and confusion, agitation, and lapses of consciousness. Nearly all rabies patients become comatose and die within 1-2 weeks of onset of symptoms.

### **What do I do if a wild animal bites me?**

If you are bitten by a wild animal, you should promptly wash the wound with soap and water. Consult with your health care provider right away to determine if the wound requires further attention and whether preventive treatment for rabies is necessary. Be prepared to provide as much detail as you can about the bite event, including date, time of day, and location where the bite occurred; a description of the biting animal; and what you were doing immediately before the bite. Your local health department may also be consulted to help evaluate your need for preventative rabies treatment, as well as to

assess the biting animal for rabies if it is available.

**What do I do if a wild animal bites my pet?**

If a wild animal bites your pet, do not attempt to intervene, handle, or capture the wild animal. Report the bite to your local animal control agency as soon as possible. If the wild animal can be caught by animal control, it will be euthanized and tested for rabies. Any animal bitten by a wild animal that is not available for testing is considered as having been exposed to rabies. Unvaccinated dogs and cats exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized immediately. Dogs and cats that are current on their rabies vaccination should be re-vaccinated immediately and then strictly isolated for 30 days.

**How can I reduce the risk of rabies for myself and my pets?**

Do not approach, handle, or attempt to feed any unfamiliar animals. Never adopt or bring wild animals into your home. Discourage wild animals from around your home by keeping garbage in closed, secure containers and collecting any uneaten pet food. Seal holes or gaps in your home where bats and other animals could enter. Take extra care to avoid animals when travelling abroad, especially dogs in developing countries where rabies is common. Ensure that all pet dogs are up-to-date on rabies vaccinations. Keep pet cats exclusively indoors if possible and discuss vaccinating your cat against rabies with your veterinarian. If you take your pets off your property, keep them restrained and under your control at all times.

**Where can I get more information about rabies?**

[The California Department of Public Health's Rabies webpage:](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Rabies.aspx)

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[The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Rabies webpage:](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies)

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